



# Stay at Home Tea

We all have those people who come into our lives and make one heck of an impact. Sometimes these people stay for a long time, others a short while. Either way, they leave an indelible mark that changes who we are. For me, that person is my daughter, Hope.

Right from birth, Hope was a fighter. She tested the boundaries of what medical professionals thought possible for a child diagnosed with cerebral palsy. Early on, I realized I would have to advocate for Hope's care; in a way, being her voice helped me find my own. Despite being extremely medically fragile and non-verbal, Hope was full of life and great at communicating what she liked and disliked with her eyes and her beautiful smile or, in a few instances, a frown. She drew people into our world who are now part of our family and invited us to experience life differently.

Hope attended Camp Easter Seal for the first time when she was 11 years old. At that time, I was a staff member at SaskAbilities, working in fundraising at the Regina Branch and raising money to send kids, just like my daughter, to Camp Easter Seal. Except, up until that point, I hadn't sent Hope. I admittedly believed Camp couldn't support my daughter's needs. After some convincing and getting called a hypocrite by the Regional Director of the Saskatoon Branch, the decision was made to send Hope with her caregiver, Sherri, to Camp. Of course, being that overprotective mother, I stayed close by at the regional campgrounds that summer, just in case Hope and Sherri needed me.

I remember that first year like it was yesterday: dropping Hope and Sherri off with all the equipment needed at Camp, and then returning later that day. I was looking all over for them, thinking Sherri was probably feeding Hope in bed, which is what I always did. I checked the "pillbox" first aid facility, chalet, and, at last, the dining hall, but they weren't there. So, I went to the front desk and was told by staff they were off having a picnic. Outside in the front, Hope's feeding bag was hanging from a tree, and she was lying on a blanket, moving her arms and legs with excitement. She had a smile as big as could be. Hope was the happiest I'd ever seen her. I started to cry at



# Hope, My Greatest Teacher

Hope and Brenda



### Hope with her caregiver, Sherri

that moment. Seeing her on this picnic with her new Camp friends is a memory forever etched in my mind. Sherri said that night Hope fell asleep with a smile on her face. I'm sure that smile never left her face every day at Camp.

Camp provided experiences for my daughter that no other place could. Hope went horseback riding, swimming, on boat rides, and even zipped around on a motorcycle. She was in her absolute glory at Camp, and as a family, we looked forward to it because we knew how much she loved it and loved having Sherri accompany her every summer. Hope attended Camp up until her health started to deteriorate and it became too difficult for her to go. The decision to stop sending Hope was a very difficult one.

As a parent, one of the most important things that I observed at Camp was that every single staff member saw my daughter as a child first, not as a child with disabilities. I never had to advocate for Hope's care at Camp Easter Seal. Staff accepted my choice to send Sherri with Hope each summer, and they certainly never saw my daughter's medical needs as a limitation in getting the full experience of Camp.

Sadly, Hope passed away in 2006 at the age of 21. Some of my favourite memories of Hope are at Camp, seeing her smiling from ear to ear and laughing so hard that liquids went flying out of her trach – I can still hear her laughter. The impact of Camp went beyond Hope's experiences of joy, as we often recount memories with her former caregiver Sherri, my husband, and daughter Erin. Camp is a special place for our whole family.

Hope taught me a lot about life – what is important and what isn't. She also taught me a lot about myself and was hugely influential in my choice to work for SaskAbilities and later become a board member. I'm grateful my daughter's legacy continues in the work I do with my fellow board members and as a supporter of Camp Easter Seal and SaskAbilities.

Today, when I walk the grounds at Camp Easter Seal, I'm filled with gratitude that a place like this exists in Saskatchewan. I think about Hope and the hundreds of children, youth, and adults who experience a unique camping adventure tailored to their specific needs and abilities. I also think about you, the generous donors who make it possible for so many families to send their loved ones to Camp each summer without financial strain and stress.

Please join me as we collectively lift our teacups in memory of my daughter, Hope, and in support of the many campers and their families touched by Camp Easter Seal. One of my family's favourite sweet treats is enclosed: black forest cookies. They aren't the prettiest desserts, but I promise you, what they lack in appearance, they more than make up for in taste and crave-ability!

Last but certainly not least, if you'd like to share in some of our fondest memories of Hope with her caregiver, Sherri, at Camp Easter Seal, we have put together a slide show specifically for you, the cherished donors of the Stay at Home Tea Campaign. Visit [saskabilities.ca](http://saskabilities.ca) to get a glimpse of Hope's world at Camp and see exactly how your donations impact families and change the lives of individuals experiencing disability in Saskatchewan.

From my family to you, thank you.

Sincerely,

Brenda Bancescu  
SaskAbilities' Board Member  
Camp Easter Seal Supporter  
Easter Seals™ Saskatchewan Volunteer Chair